

Bicycle ambulances in Nepal

For remote communities in the plains of Nepal, a bicycle ambulance provides a vital lifeline, enabling them to get the sick to medical centres quickly and in comfort.

In the villages of the flat plains of Nepal, poor people cannot reach medical care when they need it. People are dying, and there is no way to help them. Yet even in the poorest villages, people have bicycles - but how do you take a person on a bicycle when they are sick?

Practical Action was already working with the villagers to build bicycle trailers to take goods to market. The next step was to adapt them to become 'ambulances'. Practical Action provided the expertise, and the villagers themselves provided the hard work.



Saving lives

One woman with reason to be thankful for the villagers' enthusiasm for bicycle ambulances is Himalshara Thopa, from the village of Makrahar. She had been taken very ill with a fever, and her life was in danger.

Luckily, Practical Action had been piloting its bicycle ambulance in her village. All the people made a small contribution each week towards the running of the ambulance, so that they all took a share in the service it provided. Now Himalshara has been able to feel the benefit for herself, in her greatest hour of need.

Hitching the trailer to the back of their bicycle, her relatives took her quickly to the nearest health centre, some 14km away in the nearest town. One pedalled the bicycle, while another tended to Himalshara in her distress as they travelled along.

Her life was saved - but without the bicycle ambulance, she would have almost certainly died.



The Practical Action Bicycle Ambulance

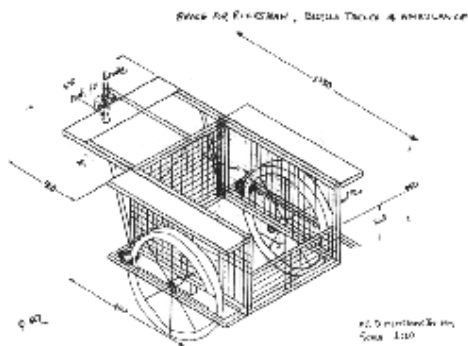
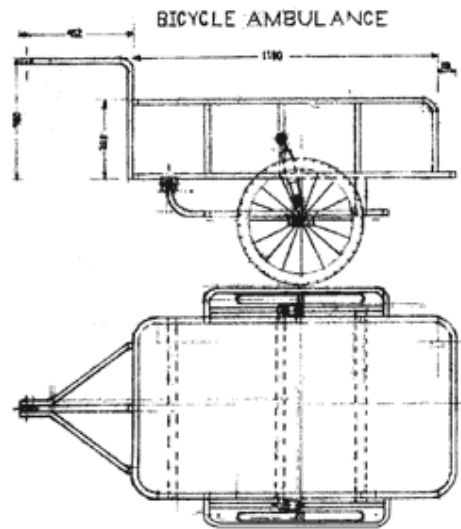
The Practical Action Bicycle trailer is being trialled in a number of communities in the terai (plains) of Nepal, where it is proving most successful. Local, specific adaptations to the basic technology ensure maximum efficiency, durability and appropriateness for the community, use and location.

The two-wheeled trailer is made from moulded metal, with standard rubber-tyred wheels. The "bed" section can be padded with cushions to make the patient comfortable, while the "seat" section allows a family member to attend to patient during transit.

A dedicated bicycle is needed to pull the ambulance trailer, so that other community members do not need to go without the bicycles they depend on in their daily lives. A joining mechanism allows for easy removal and attachment.

In response to user comments, a cover has been designed that can be added to give protection to the patient and attendant in poor weather. (The Nepal rainy season is June and July.) Made of treated cotton, the cover is durable and waterproof.

The total cost of a whole bicycle ambulance is £150 - but to people like Himalshara it is priceless.



http://practicalaction.org/?id=bicycle_ambulances